

25X1

LOGGED

IC STAFF

25X1

BI-WEEKLY WARNING ISSUES

FOR THE DCI

26 April 1989

KEY WARNING ISSUE

LEBANON/SYRIA: Iraqi Aid Increases Danger of Escalation

The National Intelligence Officer for Warning prepared this report for senior Intelligence Community officials; he is entirely responsible for its contents. Its purpose is to warn of a range of issues that could affect US national security interests and to stimulate discussion, debate, and further analysis of these issues.

NIC 00490-89

~~SECRET~~

SECRET

25X1

LEBANON/SYRIA: Iraqi Aid Increases Danger of Escalation

The promise of substantial Iraqi military aid to the Lebanese Armed Forces under General Awn has increased the risk of a more serious confrontation between Christian forces and Syrian or Syrian-backed Muslim militia units in Lebanon. In response, Syrian President Assad may tighten his naval blockade of Beirut and might try to inflict a military defeat to weaken Lebanese Christian forces. Such actions could lead to wider confrontations in the Middle East. [REDACTED]

With no prospect of defeating the Syrians and their proxies, Awn has gambled on persuading outside powers to intervene to force a Syrian withdrawal. The Iraqis' promises of real assistance seem to have stiffened Awn's resolve and may have set the stage for a further escalation of serious fighting. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Baghdad has promised equipment and ammunition [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] helicopters, and financial aid. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Iraq wants to use the Lebanon conflict to:

- o Punish the Syrians for supporting Iran during the Iran-Iraq war.
- o Embarrass Syrian President Assad.
- o Further advance its claims to leadership in the Arab world. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Syria wants to limit Iraq's role in Lebanon, to maintain Syrian military dominance there, and to avoid provoking Israel or further internationalizing the conflict. Assad has thus far shown restraint and avoided ground offensive

operations. The Syrians and their proxies have retaliated for Christian artillery attacks and the closure of Muslim ports in Lebanon; they have relied principally on siege and blockade tactics to limit casualties, to wear down the Christian forces, and to press Awn to relent. [REDACTED]

Assad has been under pressure, however, from Lebanese Muslim and Druze militia leaders, as well as from the Syrian General Staff, to crack down. News of the Iraqi arms deal, including rumors that Baghdad has agreed to provide surface-to-surface missiles to the Lebanese Christians, encourages him to take stronger measures before the new aid increases Iraq's influence. The recent gradual increase in Syrian field artillery units, coastal artillery batteries, and attack helicopter forces in Lebanon has coincided with the visit to Baghdad by Lebanese Armed Forces negotiators for talks on the arms deal. [REDACTED]

Serious Syrian attacks could inflict severe damage on Lebanese Christian units and Christian civilians and seriously undermine their morale, while demonstrating the futility of Awn's crusade against the Syrians. Such attacks would be carefully orchestrated to avoid provoking the Israelis, who have repeatedly made clear that they will not tolerate the total defeat of the Christian forces in Lebanon. Syria may hope that the prospect of further damage to their heartland would encourage Christian leaders to remove Awn and adopt more conciliatory policies. [REDACTED]

NIC 00490-89

SECRET

Syria is unlikely soon to mount a major ground assault against the well-defended Christian enclave itself. Assad, nonetheless, apparently wants to weaken Christian military forces and impose a ceasefire on Syrian terms, to reassert Syrian dominance in Lebanon, and to

limit any further increases in Iraqi influence there. **There is considerable room for miscalculation on all sides and, thus, a significant chance for a greater test of arms.**

25X1

NIC 00490-89

-2-

SECRET